

New Britain ROOTS
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Senator Hartley, Representative Gibson, and Connecticut General Assembly members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Joey Listro and I am the Executive Director for New Britain ROOTS, a non-profit that supports K-12 Farm to School programs in Greater New Britain. I also have the honor of serving as a member of the New Britain Board of Education. Today, I am writing on the proposed budget for fiscal years 2024 and 2025, concerning the Department of Agriculture. **I respectfully ask for your support in funding the CT Grown for CT Kids Grants Program with an appropriation of 1 million dollars annually.**

The grants program is working to support **increased access to healthy, local food** for students in our most vulnerable communities. In New Britain, grant funds are supporting a new school garden at Smith elementary school and a greenhouse at Lincoln Elementary School. These additions will help contribute to growing over 200 pounds of produce for New Britain students.

The grants program provides meaningful **educational experiences** for students through STEM curriculum. In New Britain, grant funds will support 30 educators with hands-on professional development in using garden-based education at their schools. We're also bringing in a beekeeper to install an observation honey beehive to supplement children's learning on the importance of pollinators and how we make honey.

The grants program supports the **mental well-being** of students by bolstering resilience and providing social and emotional support. Research shows that when children partake in outdoor learning, their social-emotional learning skills in the areas of self-management, social awareness, relationship building, and responsible decision-making improve.

The grants program helps school districts and early childhood providers **cultivate relationships with local farmers** to purchase, promote, and serve CT Grown food. New Britain schools have invested in serving food grown by local orchards and our school gardens. And children regularly take field trips to local farms.

Department of Agriculture received 131 applications requesting over two rounds of grants, with a total request of almost \$2 million dollars. DoAg was only able to award funds to 46 projects, making it one of the most competitive grant programs the agency offers. Of the awarded projects, 23 are in alliance districts and nine are providers of school readiness programs.

Over the two rounds of grant applications, the CTG4CTK program has been one of DoAg's most highly applied to programs. If funded, this grant opportunity will continue to further the Farm to School landscape in the state and will provide needed capital for agriculture and nutrition-based K-12 and Early Childcare projects.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joey Listro", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Joey Listro
Executive Director, New Britain ROOTS